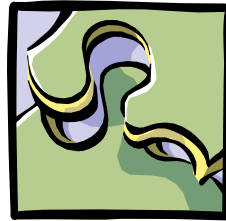


Training Module #3:



Fostering Effective Communication

Active Listening

Active listening has been defined as listening as if your life depends on it. Imagine how you would listen if someone was talking you through landing an airplane if you're not a pilot! Active listening is an important skill for personal relationships as well as work relationships.

AN ACTIVE LISTENER:

- ❖ Focuses on the speaker,
- ❖ Listens for key points and ideas,
- ❖ Does not jump to conclusions,
- ❖ Keeps mind from wandering,
- ❖ Asks non-threatening questions for clarification.

LISTENING SKILLS CHECKLIST:

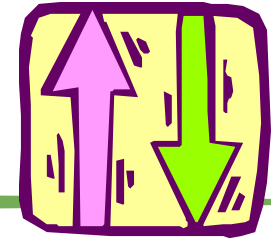
- ❖ Think about your last listening experience. Did you...

	YES	NO
1. Choose a quiet place without distractions?	_____	_____
2. Maintain eye contact?	_____	_____
3. Provide non-verbal feedback (nods, smiles)	_____	_____
4. Focus full attention on listening?	_____	_____
5. Listen for key ideas?	_____	_____
6. Allow speaker to complete thoughts?	_____	_____
7. Restate the message as you understood it?	_____	_____
8. Ask non-threatening questions for clarification?	_____	_____

REMEMBER: Never underestimate the power of listening!



Practice Your Response



INSTRUCTIONS: Below are some typical statements made on the job. Read each statement carefully and then write down a possible response. Honor the feelings first, even if you don't agree! Letting the speaker know you understand the emotion will diffuse the situation. Then deal with the content or the situation in which the statement might occur. (Possible responses provided as a model.)

COWORKER'S STATEMENT:

Can't you be more considerate while others are trying to work?

YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING RESPONSE: _____
"Please excuse the disruption, Mary, but I need to . . .

CO-WORKER'S STATEMENT:

"Now I have to write this report over. You never tell me what you really want until I get something already written!"

YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING RESPONSE: _____
"I'm sorry if I've caused you extra work, John. I will try to be more detailed with my next request."

CO-WORKER'S STATEMENT:

"I don't want to work with Bill on any more assignments. He never meets his deadlines."

OUR ACTIVE LISTENING RESPONSE: _____
"Bill is an important person on this project. Share your concern with me, Ken."

CO-WORKER'S STATEMENT:

"Five lousy minutes! You're upset because I was five minutes late?"

YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING RESPONSE: _____
"I'm concerned because it impacts our credibility when someone calls and you are not available. Can you share with me your reason for being late?"

CO-WORKER'S STATEMENT:

"Hey, there is a memo on the e-mail congratulating our team on the job we did with the annual report!"

YOUR ACTIVE LISTENING RESPONSE: _____
"Wonderful! That has to make you feel good after all you contributed."

SOURCE: MJI seminar session "Communication" by LCC instructor Sue Muttly.

Giving and Receiving Feedback

FEEDBACK is information about past behavior delivered in the present for the purpose of influencing future behavior. If we want to build, maintain, or test our relationships, feedback is our only source of information. Without feedback, how can we test the reality of our perceptions, reactions, observations, or intentions?

FEEDBACK in the workplace is fundamental for helping those who wish to improve their performance, reach an objective, or avoid unpleasant reactions to their efforts.

FEEDBACK needs to be supportive and empowering. It should be delivered without judgment and blame. It should respect and acknowledge the effort and hard work that have been put forth even though the end product may not have met the desired results.

When people receive feedback in an empowering manner, they are able to let it in and really use it. They feel appreciated and validated and as a result they want to do better. They are also more open to receiving FEEDBACK from you in the future so the overall pattern of communication is enhanced.



TRY IT!

Amy shows you a draft of a letter she is about to send out for an upcoming committee meeting. Amy did not include some necessary information in the letter. How would you provide feedback?

Motivating Others to Contribute

Have you ever been at a meeting where the facilitator asks a question and ends up offering the answer because no one speaks? Here are some insights:

ASK OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS:

Open ended questions require more than a “Yes” or “No” response. Phrase your question carefully.

ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO CONTINUE:

Even if they start to back off because they’re repeating points made earlier.

PARAPHRASE IDEAS:

When someone makes an unclear point, say, “Can you clarify that for me? I’m not clear on your question.”

DON’T FORCE YOUR VIEWS ON OTHERS:

Remain neutral and open to another’s idea before imposing your own.

MAKE SURE EVERYONE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION:

Getting everyone’s ideas will strengthen the idea.

ENCOURAGE THOSE THAT DISAGREE

to come up with a compromise.

There is always an opportunity to provide a win-win solution.

DIRECT QUESTIONS TO THOSE WHO REMAIN SILENT:

They are silent for a reason. Bring it out by saying,
“John, you’ve been very quiet. What are your thoughts?”

IF SILENCE ENSUES: Ask the last person who spoke, “Tell me more”.



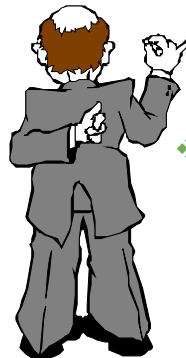
SOURCE: How To Facilitate a Productive Session, by Floyd Hurt, Charlottesville, VA.

Put “Question Power” to Work

Worded correctly, questions do more than get answers. They get results by spurring people to action, building consensus, and clearing up confusion. Poorly worded questions, on the other hand, block idea exchange, sap enthusiasm and may even foster resentment.

Effective Questions

- ❖ **OPEN/DIRECT QUESTIONS** uncover who, what, when where, why or how (How can we complete this project on time?)
- ❖ **PLANTED-ANSWER QUESTIONS** imply the specific direction you want the person's answer to take (Don't you think this outline needs more work?)
- ❖ **OFF-THE-HOOK QUESTIONS** allow people to refuse a request without losing face (I know you've put a lot of overtime in on this project, but would it be possible for you to stay tonight to finish it?)



Ineffective Questions

- ❖ **DISAGREEABLE QUESTIONS** reduce self-confidence and are framed as a challenge or attack (None of your other ideas have worked so what makes you think this one will?)
- ❖ **NO-WAY-OUT-QUESTIONS** drive people into corners (As I see it, this is the only solution. How can you possibly disagree?)
- ❖ **TRICK QUESTIONS** are traps to get others to agree as there is little or no choice given. (Should we follow my plan or put in some long hours making changes?)

SOURCE: *Common Sense Leadership* by Roger Fultom, published by Ten Speed Press. ISBN 0-89815-743-9

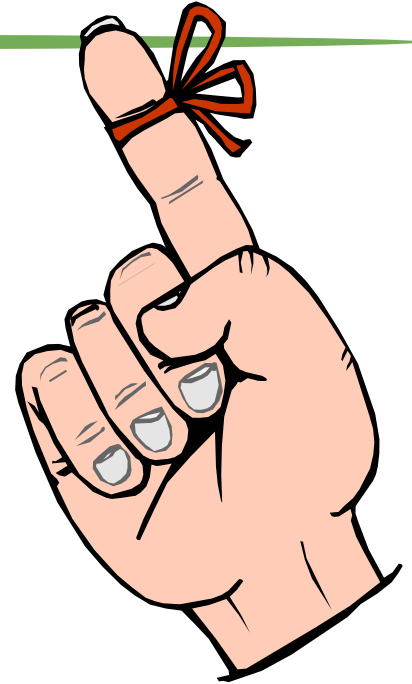
Remember

If you

ASK SOMEONE A QUESTION ...

REMAIN SILENT.

Usually after only the slightest pause,
the other person will start to elaborate.



SOURCE: *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*
by Mark McCormack. Published by Bantam Books

The Silent Message



Studies have shown that people evaluate your message based on the following input: body language 55%, voice inflection 38%, and actual words 7%.

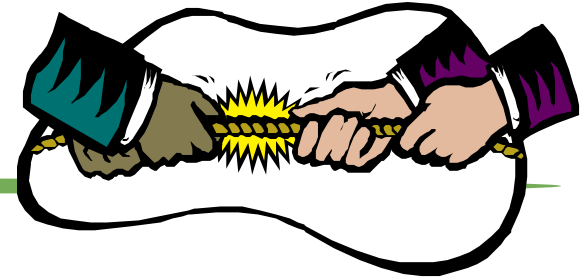
Body Language Around The World

- ❖ IN BELGIUM: Placing your hands in your pockets when speaking is considered rude .
- ❖ IN FINLAND: Standing with your arms folded is considered a sign of arrogance.
- ❖ IN FRANCE: To offer a strong, pumping handshake is considered uncultured.
- ❖ IN GERMANY: A dinner guest will rap his knuckles lightly on the table to signal a greeting to everyone. The same gesture applies when the person leaves the table.
- ❖ IN HUNGARY: Do not “chink” your glass with another when making a toast. Doing so is rude.
- ❖ IN THE NETHERLANDS: It is considered rude to leave the table before the end of the meal .
- ❖ IN POLAND: A person will invite you to join in a drink by flicking his finger against his neck.
- ❖ IN SPAIN: It is considered “unfeminine” for women to cross their legs.

Think about the
silent messages
you may be sending!

SOURCE: “*Silent Messages*” by Albert Mehrabian of UCLA.

Word Choices



Word choice impacts attitudes. You can deliver the same message and avoid conflict if you choose carefully.

INSTEAD OF:	TRY:
"You're flexible."	"It's important to listen to everyone's opinion."
"You're always late."	"We need you to get to work on time each day."
"You're not a team player."	"The team is counting on you to cooperate."
"I see your point but I'd like to give it more thought."	"I see your point AND I'd like to give it more thought."
"You always drop the ball on this type of thing."	"I remember some challenges we have had in the past in completing these types of tasks."
"That's our policy."	"I wish I could offer you additional assistance. Is there anything else I can do?"
Responding defensively when your boss criticizes you.	Ask respectfully how the boss would have handled the situation under similar circumstances.
Telling people how busy you've been when reminded that you had promised to do something for them.	Apologizing and setting another time line that allows you to complete the request.

SOURCE: William T. Keefe, Interactive Data Center , (508) 643-9333 AND Nich Kovalakides, Director of Visitor Services, University of Maryland.

BEFORE you offer advice



You mean well by offering a co-worker advice. So be sure your comments are phrased in a way that models that concern.

- ❖ **CHOOSE THE TIME AND PLACE WITH CAREFUL CONSIDERATION:** Don't offer advice when you are angry. Your delivery will not be effective. The best time may be when it is just the two of you and at a time that is conducive to having a discussion.
- ❖ **START OFF BY SAYING SOMETHING GOOD:** Don't jump on someone else's idea without laying some groundwork. An opening such as: "I have some ideas that may help you..." gets others ready to listen. It also gives them a chance to stop you if they don't want your input.
- ❖ **USE "I" AND "WE":** The other person will be less likely to feel threatened and more likely to listen with an open mind. Instead of: "What you need to do is..." use yourself as an example: "What helps me is..."
- ❖ **DIRECT YOUR ADVICE OR CRITICISM AT THE ACTION, NOT AT THE PERSON:** All of us have bad days.
- ❖ **SHORT AND SWEET:** Don't belabor the point with a long-winded lecture on the subject.
- ❖ **OFFER TO HELP:** Again, if you are well-intentioned in your advice, offer to help resolve the problem.
- ❖ **SHOW THE PERSON YOU UNDERSTAND HIS OR HER FEELINGS:** "I understand why you might have thought that was the best action to take."
- ❖ **AT THE END, REAFFIRM:** Make sure the discussion reaffirms your support and confidence in the person.

SOURCE: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan.

Bad News Guidelines



If you are delivering bad news to your superior or others:

REPORT THE PROBLEM PROMPTLY:

Telling your superior right away will often allow time to resolve the problem before it gets worse.

GIVE ONLY THE NECESSARY FACTS:

Overstating the problem could make it look worse than it is. Think it through before your report and be ready to explain exactly what happened.

USE TACT:

Don't say something such as, "This is a terrible situation." Instead you might say, "Here's something I thought you should know about."

OFFER A SOLUTION:

Don't just tell your supervisor about the problem. Recommend a way to correct the mistake or an error in judgment. Doing so will demonstrate your skill in handling difficult situations.

DON'T DELIVER ONLY THE BAD NEWS:

Report the good news as well. Always appearing with the negative information will not make you a welcome guest on anyone's doorstep.

SOURCE: *For the President's Eyes Only*, Bureau of Business Practice, Waterford, CT. 06386

The Key to Winning Back Angry Customers

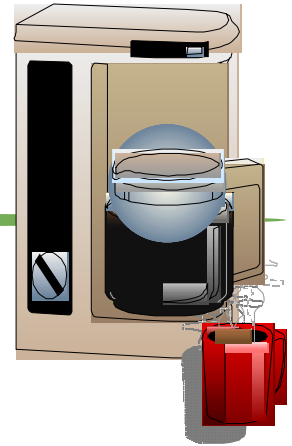


The key to dealing with angry customers is communication. Your ability to handle conflict when dealing with the public can actually increase their confidence in you and the court. Between 82% and 95% of complaining individuals will be happy with your service if they feel you've tried to address their problem.

- ❖ **DEAL WITH EMOTIONS FIRST:** Listen and respond with empathy.
"I'm sorry this is causing you so much frustration. How would you like me to help?"
LISTEN ATTENTIVELY: If the person is having trouble getting to the point, you may choose to say ,
"I'm sorry to interrupt you. Do I understand correctly that you need..?"
- ❖ **ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS TO GET THE SPECIFICS:** Word your questions carefully and clearly.
"Is this your first time at the court?" or "Have you talked with someone before?"
- ❖ **DON'T OVERREACT:** Focus on the issue and not on the sarcasm or innuendos. Stay calm.
- ❖ **AVOID ARGUING:** Listen to what the person is saying. Using their name when talking to them often defuses the situation.
- ❖ **RESTATE THE ISSUES AND CONFIRM YOUR UNDERSTANDING:** "From what you are telling me, do I understand correctly that you need...?"
- ❖ **OFFER A CHOICE OF ALTERNATIVES TO RESOLVE THE SITUATION:** "I cannot provide that information to you. Perhaps my supervisor will be able to help."
- ❖ **LET CUSTOMERS DECIDE WHICH ALTERNATIVE TO USE:** "Would you like me to see if my supervisor is available now or would you like me to take your phone number and a time when it is convenient for him/her to call you?"
- ❖ **FOLLOW THROUGH ON WHAT YOU AGREE TO DO.**

When Faced with Office Rumors or Criticism

Office gossip and criticism are some of the most powerful and potentially destructive forces in the workplace. To reduce the harmful effects:



RESPOND TO GOSSIP WITH SKEPTICISM: “I don’t believe he/she would do that.” or “I find that hard to believe.”

GOSSIP IS HURTFUL: Gently remind rumormongers of others’ feelings with statements such as: “I would hate for someone to say that about me.” Remind others that gossip can hurt or destroy lives and careers , and is therefore NOT an innocent pastime.

SET UP DETERRENTS: Use strong language to deter persistent gossipers: “If this is gossip, I don’t want to hear it.” Remember, if they gossip about others, they will gossip about you too!

IF YOU ARE FACED WITH CRITICISM ASK FOR SPECIFICS: “You said the report was incomplete. Can you give me more details?” or “You mentioned that someone complained about my actions. Can you be more specific?”

BE A COFFEE FILTER: If you are faced with criticism, act like a coffee filter. Strain out the emotional grounds from the facts. This allows you to respond to the information and not the criticism.

IF YOU ARE IN THE WRONG, ADMIT IT: Sometimes this is easier if you tell the other person, “You are right.” However you do it, honesty is the best policy. If you are wrong, don’t discredit yourself further. Admit the error and move on.

SOURCE: “The New York Public Library Business Desk Reference,” published by John Wiley & Sons ,(800) 225-5945, and Mel Ann Coley, Coley Training & Development, Garland, TX.

Resolving Conflict



STIFLING CONFLICT BREEDS RESENTMENT: Using authority to stifle conflict only breeds resentment which leads to another set of problems. Deal with the conflict openly.

CONFLICT IS HEALTHY: A certain amount of conflict is good. If the conflict is not out in the open, it is probably festering beneath the surface.

CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE: Recognize that conflict is always a part of human interaction. Remembering this will help you keep your perspective on the situation.

CONFLICT MAY FOSTER BETTER IDEAS: It sometimes takes conflict for people to come together to generate and build new and better ideas. Model this philosophy.

MAKE “WIN-WIN” A GOAL : Aim to help both parties win (or at least claim to win) something. Help both parties maintain self-esteem and save face.

SEEK OUT HIDDEN AGENDAS: Sometimes the real issue is hidden. For example, one co-worker may be resisting a new idea, not because the idea itself is bad, but because he/she developed the “old” one and is therefore feeling threatened.

HELP OTHERS SEE THE POSITIVE: Help others see how resolving the conflict will benefit everyone.

SOURCE: www.leadersdirect.com/conflict.html

**“Courage
is what it takes to stand up and
SPEAK;
courage is also what it takes
to sit down and
LISTEN.”**

Winston Churchill